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PII Redacted

ANNIE

A Hungarian Holocaust Story

Anne Gabor Arancio

Betty J. Iverson

PROLOGUE

We are in a reflection mode today. I feel it is very important to document what happened to us in that time period of the Second World War, so that the events are not buried with the passage of time. Lily, our rescuer, and I were interviewed in Hungary, and the tape will be shown to children in school there. When Betty asked about writing my story, I agreed. As we met together, the flood gates of my memories were opened to produce this narrative which she then crafted into words in a way I could not have done.

My daughter, Vicky, spoke recently at the Bat Mitzvah of my granddaughter, Rebecca. In her speech, she commended Lily Kriszhaber, the woman who hid my mother, my sister and me in Budapest during the Second World War.

“In the Shabbat service, we are told ,” Vicky said, “You shall not stand idle while your neighbor bleeds.’ The first thing I want to say is that we would not be here without a woman in Hungary who did not stand idle. In 1944, Lily Kriszhaber risked her life to hide your Grandma Anne, Great Aunt Vali and Great Grandma Rose from the Hungarian Nazis. I want to acknowledge Lily, who is 89 years old and still alive and well in Budapest. Although she could not travel here today, she is with us in spirit. Lily is a woman who went above and beyond the Ten Commandments in her courage to do what was right. When we look at you today, Rebecca, we are forever grateful to Lily Kriszhaber, a Righteous Gentile. That is why your Bat Mitzvah, your spiritual rite of passage, is dedicated to Lily.”

When I sent Vicky’s Bat Mitzvah speech to Lily in Budapest, she showed it to her cardiologist, who said, “This is worth more than any monument.” This story is our family’s monument to Lily. I dedicate this book to her.

Anne Gabor Arancio

When I first met Annie, she mentioned spending the end of the war in a wine cave in Budapest. I have had an abiding interest in World War Two narratives and filed that comment away in my mind. Recently I contacted Annie, and she agreed to tell her story. I did not know what to expect and was amazed as her powerful holocaust experience unfolded. Her story is one you can wrap your heart around. I felt a deep admiration for Annie’s spirit, her mother’s wisdom, her sister’s courage and Lily’s compassion and bravery. Writing Annie’s story was a joy.

Betty J. Iverson

ANNIE

CHAPTER ONE GYULA 1926-1940

GROWING UP, A TIME OF UPHEAVAL

“Christ Killers, Christ Killers,” the taunt rang out. Annie felt the pelt of snow balls on her back-pack. The attacks were becoming more frequent. As usual, she never saw the attacker.

“Hurry Vali,” she called to her sister and ran. “Let’s head for the square.” She looked around but saw no one. Glancing back at Valerie, Annie noticed the tears on her sister’s cheeks, and spoke to reassure her. “You mustn’t let them upset you. We didn’t do anything wrong.”

“I know, I know,” said Valerie. “It’s just that it hurts me to run.”

Annie nodded. She knew that her sister felt constant pain in her right leg since she’d had a bone infection two years ago. An infection that never went away. Annie was protective of her younger sister, even though Valerie was only a year younger. Vali, as everyone called her, was a pretty girl of eight with even features, blue eyes and long thick blond braids. Her hair was so curly, ringlets formed around her head, even with the tightly woven braids. Annie smiled to herself as she thought that, although Vali was pretty, and considered the brain in the family, she, Annie, was known as the beauty. Blond with hazel eyes and high cheek bones, Annie’s beauty rested more in her precocious spirit than in her looks. She was quite slim, a fact that worried her Grandmother Ida. “You’re so skinny, I could thread you through the eye of a needle,” she often told her.

Annie and Vali were on their way home from school at the synagogue courtyard, a one

room school where all the classes met together. They didn't mind the long walk through the village, but they hated the insults. The taunts today were frightening but not unusual. In this village of only twenty-six thousand people, Annie and Vali knew those areas where they were not welcome and carefully avoided them. The diverse populations in Gyula resided in sections such as German town, Swabian town, and Rumanian town. Annie and Vali never ventured into these areas. While the Jewish people were not segregated here, they were easily identified. In fact, since Annie and Vali's grandmother owned a fabric store, she was well known and thus the girls could be a target. The snow ball attack today was on a street they considered safe. Annie wondered who had followed them.

Gyula was the only village Annie and Vali had ever known, and their family had lived here for generations. This town was a county seat in Hungary on the Rumanian border, and a commercial center for all the peasant farmers in the countryside. The tallest building in town, the city hall, was only three stories tall. The Koros River wound through the town like a gurgling stream through the flat terrain. There were picnics along the banks in the summer, and ice skating on the frozen stream in the winter.

Annie and Vali stopped running once they reached the village square and collapsed on a bench next to the Reformed Church. The Catholic Church was across the square. Resting on the bench, Annie thought about the changes in their lives in such a short time. She and Vali lived with their Grandmother Ida and Uncle Laci, while their mother, Rose lived in the capitol of Budapest. Their lives had changed dramatically when their father died two years ago.

Annie had adored her father, Emery. She was only seven at the time. She still thought of

him every day, and images of her father tumbled constantly through her mind. Annie saw him, the serious attorney, in his finest suit, standing tall in front of the hall mirror as he brushed his thinning dark hair. He looked elegant on those days when he went to court. She could never forget his look of pride when she first beat him at chess, or his encouragement as he ran alongside her bike holding onto the seat when he taught her to ride a two-wheeler. These images often brought tears to her eyes. He was never too busy for her or Vali. No one suspected then that within his chest was a weakening heart.

When her father complained of vague chest pain, her mother had insisted that he go to Budapest to see a specialist. Tests were done, and he was told that he had angina pectoris, a heart condition related to an old war injury. He came home with pills to take when he felt chest pain. Annie was troubled each time he became short of breath with just the slightest exertion. When they walked under the chestnut trees in the People's Park in Gyula, he often stopped to rest. The cane he had seldom used soon became his constant companion.

The last picture of her father was one of him standing on the bridge over the frozen river looking on proudly as Annie skated by. She glanced up and waved, and he waved back. He stood there so long, his feet were frostbitten by the end of the afternoon. How she loved him and longed for the way things used to be- she and Vali living with him and their mother Rose. They would be at Grandmother Ida's house just once a week for family dinners-not all the time.

And then suddenly, he was gone. The day her father died was painfully etched in Annie's memory. She and Vali were at school, when a boy ran into their classroom, interrupting the class by yelling, "Annie. Vali. Come home. Your father just died."

Numb with shock, Annie and her sister, tears streaming down their cheeks, rushed to the back of the room to grab their coats from the hooks on the wall. They hurried home, but were met by a neighbor, who told them they couldn't go in. Their mother came to the door then and said, "You must stay with Grandmother Ida for a few days."

"What happened to Papa? Why can't we come in?" Annie asked through her tears.

Rose calmly explained to Annie and Vali that their father had collapsed as he presented a case in court that morning. Efforts to revive him had failed.. Rose's voice cracked and she fought back tears as she murmured, "He said good bye to us this morning-- like an ordinary day. Then they brought him home to me, dead."

Her shoulders shook with the sobs she could no longer contain. Annie and Vali clung to their mother. Annie asked her mother again if they could go inside, but she shook her head.

The next day, Annie and Vali were taken to their home to view their father's body laid on a bed of straw in the living room. They were ushered out before the funeral service began. Annie pleaded with her grandmother to allow them to stay.

"No," Grandmother Ida said firmly, "This is the custom. Children do not go to funerals in our family."

Three days passed before Annie and Vali were allowed to return home. Annie stared at the empty bed of straw in the living room, with the imprint of her father's body still on it. She had an eerie feeling as she saw so vividly the contours of his body.

Annie could not believe that her father was gone. She wandered into his study and sat at his desk. She waited for him to come home in the evening, and longed for the sound of his

footsteps on the stairs, or the scent of soap as he bent to kiss her.. Annie had seen her father's body on that bed of straw, yet she pretended that was only a bad dream. Soon he'd be back with them.

But her father's death became more real to her each day as she watched her mother observe the Jewish custom of Shivet. Rose, dressed in black, sat on a low bench, and greeted the friends and relatives who came by to express their condolences. She sat on that bench for a week. Annie's mother's tears flowed freely then, but once the Shivet had ended, she dried her eyes. Annie saw instead a sad but determined woman..

Rose observed the usual one year of mourning, and during this time she designed and placed the tombstone on her husband's grave. Annie recalled all the gossip about this. A woman designing a tombstone? No one had ever done this before, least of all a woman. Her mother was creative and artistic, but nonchalant about gossip. She ignored the whispers. When the tombstone was placed, Annie was awestruck by the beauty of this simple flat marble piece inscribed with a carved replica of her father's medal of honor. She knew he had been highly decorated for bravery in World War I. Her mother's creative bent was shown in the lovely marble jardiniere with claw feet placed on the top of the marble slab. She went often with her mother to fill it with flowers.

When her year of mourning ended, Rose left for Budapest to establish herself as a dressmaker. Annie and Vali, who were now ten and nine, moved in with Grandmother Ida.

Annie's reverie was interrupted by a tug on her sleeve, as Vali said, "Can we go home now, Annie?"

“How do you feel, Vali?”

“I’m all right now. My leg doesn’t hurt as much,” Vali said, standing up. “We don’t want to be too late or Grandmother will worry.”

Annie stood up and helped Vali put on her back- pack. As they strolled along, Annie thought of Grandmother Ida Brill, a strong, smart woman, who was stocky and big busted with light brown hair and a formidable expression- -until she smiled. Grandmother Ida had been widowed in her thirties with five children to rear. She established a fabric store to support her family and proved to be a shrewd businesswoman. Ida was fiercely proud of her success and of all her children.

Annie’s mother, Rose, was the third child and 16 when her father died. She had eloped with an artist at nineteen, but soon left him and later married Annie’s father. The oldest son, Emery, a university graduate, lived in Budapest with his wife and son, Gabor. (Gabriel) Gabor was one of Annie’s favorite cousins. The second child was Mancie (Margaret), a jolly woman whom Annie adored. Mancie lived in the village with her husband and two sons. The youngest daughter was Kati (Kathleen), who Annie thought was very beautiful. Laci (Laszlo), was the last of the siblings and a bachelor who lived with his mother. He had a reputation in the village as a ladies’ man.

Annie didn’t mind that Laci ignored her and Vali. In fact, she and her sister found Laci rather amusing, especially when he wore an elastic hair net at night. He looked so ridiculous. Annie had never seen anything like that hair net, except in Italian films.

Annie loved her grandmother, but wished she wasn’t so overprotective. Grandmother

Ida took her responsibility for them quite seriously, Annie thought. Still, Annie missed her mother and longed for the day when she and Valerie could join her in Budapest. Annie knew her mother would be a successful couture. She was also proud that her mother was not only smart, but attractive. She could picture her slim figure, oval face, curly brown hair and sparkling brown eyes.

People often told Annie she was like her mother. While she admired her mother, she did not want to be working in a trade like her mother did. Annie's dream was to go the university and study many subjects, from people to art. She believed that Hungarian saying, "A specialist is a Barbarian." An engineer knew only about engineering, while Annie wanted to know about many things. Yes, she would be an educated woman.

Although she could not visit often, Rose wrote Annie and Vali letters. She told them about all the remarkable things she was learning from the best teacher in Budapest, and her trips to Paris for the fashion shows. "I've become quite good at copying some of the outfits I've seen there," she wrote.

When Rose left, she had hired a governess for Annie and Vali, since Ida was busy at the store. Annie smiled as she recalled that there wasn't a governess, but a succession of them. She loved the first girl from Germany, who came to teach them German, but instead learned Hungarian. The second governess was Hungarian and she and Vali loved her, too. Unfortunately, so did Uncle Laci, and that governess left when she became pregnant. After that, Ida decided they could manage without a governess, and Annie and Vali were often at the fabric store with their grandmother.

Annie and Vali arrived home at dusk. Much to Annie's relief, Grandmother Ida did not notice they were late, when she told them dinner was waiting, adding, "Uncle Laci won't be joining us this evening."

Annie wondered why her grandmother even mentioned that. Uncle Laci rarely joined them for dinner, usually spending the evening at the Grill, a local bar in the village. Laci was called "Grill Brill", because he spent so much time there. He seldom came home before two in the morning, when she and Vali were already asleep. Annie knew this because he awakened her sometimes with his loud singing, usually something from a Hungarian opera like, "I'm pining after a woman, and I can't hold myself back. Desire is pushing me." Annie would roll over and cover her head with her pillow as she dozed off, laughing, imagining that hair net.

While they ate their soup, Grandmother Ida mentioned how busy she was in the store. "I'll need you there early tomorrow, Annie and Vali. Saturday is the county market day and I expect many 'paraszts' (peasants) will be coming to the village."

Annie nodded. She enjoyed working at the store. Vali went along, but usually did not help much, since her painful leg would not tolerate the brisk pace and hours of standing. She often took a book along and read in the back room.

Grandmother Ida's shop, located on the shore of the river, was the most elegant in the village. More importantly, the store was on the road leading to the large plaza where the weekly markets were held. The 'paraszts,' who grew their crops on the lands owned by large land owners, brought their produce and wares to sell at the market. Many of them came to the fabric store to shop.

Annie and Vali left early the next morning with their grandmother. The day was cool and rainy, and Grandmother Ida worried that many of the peasants would stay home.

"They still have their produce to sell, Grandmother," observed Annie. "Besides, the stalls are covered. If they get too cold, they'll be glad to come into the store and get warm."

"Oh Annie," said Ida. "You're always the optimistic one. I hope you're right."

Annie loved working with all the fabrics at the store which came in large bolts and were stacked on shelves against the wall. Grandmother Ida traveled to fairs in Dresden and Vienna where she selected the best fabrics. On one of her trips, she had bought beautiful dolls for her granddaughters. Her doll was one of Annie's prized possessions because it represented travel and beautiful fabrics. One of Annie's jobs was to keep the bolts neatly stacked according to color and type of fabric. Today was no exception, and she straightened the messy shelves as soon as she saw them.

While Vali headed to the back room, Annie found the large boxes of babushkas, and arranged a display of them on a table. The babushkas of blue and white were an everyday head covering for the women. Blue dye was plentiful and stylish. Babushkas woven of wool in a Turkish motif were more elegant, and customers bought these to wear on Sundays or special occasions.

Annie greeted the first customer of the day, a young paraszt woman, who asked about fabric for a dress. She knew this woman would not be interested in silks or brocades but some of the simple cottons. Chatting pleasantly, she learned the woman was pregnant and needed a wardrobe to accommodate her expanding figure. Annie reached up and took from the shelf

several bolts of cotton materials in plain colors, no pattern. She took the first bolt in her hand, and unwound the light blue material, gathering the fabric in her hand to show the young woman how the material would drape on her figure. Soon Annie had made her first sale of the day. The young woman also bought a blue and white babushka. Business was brisk, and the day went quickly.

“You were right, Annie,” said her grandmother, later. “Business was good today.”

“Yes it was, wasn’t it?” Annie said, “I had fun. I never tire of looking at all those fabrics on the shelf and imagining what kind of a dress I could create.”

Market day ended and Annie strolled home with her sister and grandmother. Her grandmother’s house was a large U-shaped one story corner house. Corner houses were considered the most impressive of all the houses in the village. Still, the house felt like an apartment building to her, since the dwelling was divided into four apartments. Besides her grandmother’s apartment, there were three others, all rented to tenants, one of whom was a judge. Annie knew how proud her grandmother was of her house, her beautiful store and the fact that she was a “Virilist”, or large taxpayer.

When Annie and Vali arrived home, they found a letter from their mother waiting for them. She wrote that now she was as well-known in Budapest as some coutures were in Paris.

“When I moved to Budapest in 1934, I felt that business here would continue as usual.

Although the government had issued some antisemitic laws after the First World War, including restrictions on Jewish admissions into the universities, I chose to ignore all the many exclusionary laws. After all,” she continued, “I’m not affected because I’m a crafts person.

Those of us in the crafts industry have a special place in Budapest. And see, I was right. My business is going well, and no one has bothered me.” Rose ended her letter with an exciting announcement, “I have arranged for you girls to go to a summer camp for a month. The camp is on the Danube River.”

Annie and Vali read their mother’s letter over and over. Although she visited them two or three times a year, they wanted to live with her. Still, camp offered a different experience from the village.

Their two weeks at the camp passed by quickly. The camp was actually a compound of homes arranged in a circle around a large lawn, which the camp director, Anna, had rented for the summer. Anna was a physical education teacher, who taught the girls all sorts of sports from volley- ball to ping pong. Annie and Vali shared a bedroom in one of the homes but ate all their meals with the other girls at large tables set up on the lawn. This was the first time Annie had ever mingled with sophisticated, upper middle class city girls, and she found that stimulating. She liked the fact that the camp not only taught sports, but encouraged intellectual pursuits from poetry readings to the singing of folk songs as they hiked. This was Annie’s first exposure to Hungarian writers and music. Anna told them that these folk songs had been collected by Bartok and Kodaly.

While Annie made friends easily with the city girls, she was conscious of being a simple village girl. She hoped that this experience would prepare her for the day when she moved to Budapest. Perhaps she’d even go to the gymnasium with some of these girls. Going to camp became an annual summer event that Annie and Vali looked forward to. While Vali could not

manage all the sports or the strenuous hiking, she loved the singing and the poetry reading.

When Annie was ten, she transferred to the middle school, a public school for girls. She had always gone to the synagogue with her male cousins, but now they, too, went to another school, a Catholic gymnasium. Annie walked a different route to school which wound through the town square. She often encountered a friendly Catholic priest, who always smiled a cheerful, "Good Morning." She felt accepted by him, but the Orthodox priest frightened her. He either ignored her completely or greeted her with the sign of the cross. The friendly Catholic priest impressed Annie, and she was surprised to learn that he was a baron from a wealthy, influential family, whose brother was the ambassador to Rome. She couldn't imagine why a baron would choose to become a priest.

One day when Annie returned home from school, her grandmother greeted her with the news, "Your mother is coming for a visit. She'll be here tomorrow afternoon on the Penny Train."

"I can't wait to see her," said Annie. She had been thinking it had been a long time since her mother's last visit. She knew her mother always visited when the train fares were the lowest. "Does Vali know yet?"

"Oh yes," said Ida. "And she's just as excited as you are. We'll leave early tomorrow so we can greet her when she arrives."

Annie smiled at her grandmother's words. Her mother's arrival always set off a stir of excitement through the village. When people heard Rose was coming, they would line the road leading to the train station just to see her in one of her latest fashions. She always brought a bit

of the outside world to Gyula. Who could predict what Rose would be wearing this time? Annie could hardly contain her curiosity and excitement.

The next morning, Annie and Vali stood along the road with other villagers. Suddenly they heard the whistle of the train and soon spied their mother walking down the road. She looked like a model in a fashion show with her slim figure and shapely legs. Rose was wearing a purple velveteen dress with a peplum, a short flounce that attached to her waist and extended down over her hips, with a matching velveteen hat and high heels. The hat was huge, and a creation to behold with humming birds nesting in velveteen. Annie was so proud. Not only had she never seen high heeled shoes before, but she guessed that most of the people of Gyula hadn't either- nor French fashions, for that matter. Her mother looked like a Paris lady. A soft murmur spread through the crowd as Rose passed by. Annie heard comments, "Look at that hat? Did you ever see such a thing? And Rose-she looks taller, don't you think?"

Annie and Vali broke away from the crowd and ran to hug their mother.

"Oh my darlings, how I've missed you," Rose cried, as she bent to hug them.

Annie watched as her grandmother hugged her mother. Ida waited until they arrived home, before she began to ply her daughter with questions about the business. Rose threw her hat on the couch and sat down, looking about the familiar room she remembered so well.

She spoke about her many clients and growing business. "I've had to add two more seamstresses," she said.

Ida nodded approvingly. After a few minutes, however, Rose stood up and walked about the room and rearranged the chairs and moved the couch, as Ida and the girls watched.

“The room looks better this way, mother,” she said by way of explanation.

“Rose, Rose,” said Ida. “Must you always rearrange my furniture the minute you get here? You’re like a hurricane. I think I’ll call you, “Hurricane Rose.”

Annie and Vali giggled at their grandmother’s words. While Ida was clearly irritated, their mother was oblivious, as if creativity granted her privileges. Rose’s sense of confidence in her abilities had made her a successful designer, yet on occasions such as this her confidence annoyed her mother.

Finally the day arrived that Annie had longed for. Her mother had reached a decision. She was just fourteen and Vali, thirteen, when Rose called and talked at length with Grandmother Ida. When her grandmother handed the phone to Annie, she was elated to hear her mother say, “Your grandmother and I have discussed it. You and Vali are coming to live with me in Budapest. I can now support you. I’m so happy we’ll be together again.”

Annie had not seen her mother since she had created such a stir in the village with her new Paris outfit and she closed her eyes to recall her mother in that dress with the peplum.

Annie said laughingly, “You know that outfit you wore the last time you were here?”

Rose paused and said, “You mean the purple one?”

“That’s the one,” said Annie. “Well the judge’s wife had the dress copied. She’s so fat that she looked like a sausage in a long pebble velveteen dress with a fox trimmed peplum. You would’ve loved to have seen her.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” laughed Rose. “I’ll send for you as soon as I can arrange everything.”

When Annie hung up the phone, she noticed the fleeting expression of sadness on her grandmother's face. She had not considered that her grandmother would miss them. She hugged her and said, "Don't worry, Grandmother, we'll visit often. And you can come to Budapest to see us. Won't that be grand?"

Ida nodded, forcing a smile. "Yes, it will, Annie. That will be grand, indeed. And remember, even though you're with your mother, I'll still buy you luxuries."

Annie smiled. She knew that she was special to Ida because she was so much like her. Vali was quiet and rather sickly, while Annie was outgoing like her grandmother. Yes, Annie understood the emptiness that lay ahead for her grandmother.

PEST September 1940-June, 1944

WAR CLOUDS ON THE HORIZON

Annie was excited as she and Vali followed their mother up the stairs to her second floor apartment in Pest. The apartment was in an old stone three story building that enclosed a courtyard. On the ground floor were shops, with steps leading up to the apartments. The building had been designated as a national monument, since Jacob Marastomi, who founded the first Hungarian Art Academy, had lived here from 1846-1860. The building was near the Danube River in the downtown area of Pest, the flat spread out section of Budapest with shops, businesses, apartments and government buildings. Annie stared at the old stone houses of Buda rising high in the hills on the opposite side of the Danube River. She vowed to walk there soon, since she had heard that Buda was very lovely. Their particular apartment was also near the Dohany Street Synagogue, rumored to be the largest one in Europe. While Annie's family observed Jewish customs, they seldom went to services. She wondered if she'd ever have a chance to see this Reformed synagogue, where women entered on the lower floor, and sat apart from the men.

Although her mother had carefully planned how to accommodate both her daughters and her business in her two bedroom apartment, the place felt crowded to Annie. The salon or living room was the fitting room for Rose's clients during the day, and a bedroom had been converted into a workroom. There were six seamstresses or apprentices busily sewing.

"These girls make all the dresses, including the evening dresses," Rose said. "But the

suits and coats we send out to a tailor. Sometimes, I use a furrier to add the trim.”

Annie nodded, impressed with all the business activities in the apartment, but she was more concerned about her needs. “Where will Vali and I sleep?” she asked.

Rose led them to the second bedroom, where she had placed day beds for them. Annie nodded approvingly. She and Vali then followed their mother down a wide hall to the kitchen. As they walked through the hall, Rose explained that this was where she slept, and Annie noticed a small sleeper couch, placed against one wall next to a ceramic stove.

“Now I’ll introduce you girls to a very important person, our maid, Juli,” Rose said as she opened the kitchen door.

Juli was a tiny apple cheeked woman in her early thirties with a broad smile, who came forward to welcome Annie and Vali. She had been stirring a richly fragrant stew in a soup kettle on a large iron stove. She beamed when Annie asked for a taste.

“Delicious,” Annie said as she handed the spoon back to Juli. Annie looked around the kitchen, noticing the large basket of wood next to the stove. The room felt warm and cozy to her.

“Juli will need your help every day, Annie, to get the wood,” said Rose. “We need lots of wood for all our stoves. Besides this stove which burns wood for cooking, there is one in the bathroom to heat the water, and three ceramic stoves to heat the apartment.”

“Of course, mother,” said Annie. She turned to Juli and said, “I’ll be glad to help you, Juli. Where is the wood stored?”

“The wood is stacked in the basement. Here’s the basket I use to carry it up in,” said

Juli as she picked up a large wicker basket with two handles. "You grab one side and I grab the other. I get up early so there will be hot water for all of you in the morning."

Rose then pointed out the small bedroom next to the kitchen where Juli slept. Their mother had saved the best for last, the spacious bathroom and the claw- footed tub. Annie had never seen such a large bath tub. Above the tub Annie saw a huge stove for heating the water.

"I can't wait to have a bath in that tub with lots of hot water," Annie said, longingly.

Rose smiled, "Hot water is precious, Annie. Most likely, a hot bath will be a Sunday treat for the three of us," she said prophetically.

Annie and Vali walked around the apartment for one more look and pronounced it perfect.

The next morning at breakfast, Rose said, "We must continue your education. Valerie, I've arranged for you to finish eighth grade and then continue at the gymnasium. First, however, I will take you to a doctor to see about your leg."

Annie waited expectantly for the announcement that she would be going to the gymnasium. Instead her mother turned to her and said, "Annie, you will stay here with me and become one of my apprentices."

"What?" Annie could not believe her mother's words. "But I want to go to the gymnasium, too, like Vali. I don't know anyone who didn't finish the gymnasium." Tears rolled down her cheeks. "I'm only fourteen, and yet I'm singled out to be a working crafts person and pushed down to the lower class. Everyone in my generation gets at least a baccalaureate." She felt devastated as she realized her education dream was being snatched

away.

“Annie, Annie,” Rose said calmly. “There’s an exclusionary law now. If that trend continues, Jews will be excluded from the university. By the time you finished the gymnasium in another four years, you couldn’t go to the university anyway.” Her mother patted her hand as she said softly, “Having a trade will be good for you. You never know when that trade will be helpful.”

Annie sensed her mother had made a firm decision, and it would be useless for her to argue further. She sighed and decided to make the most of the opportunity to become involved in the fashion business with her mother.

Rose then turned to Vali, “We will see a specialist this week,” she said.

Vali nodded in agreement, saying, “My leg still hurts, but not as much. Do I really need to see a doctor?”

“You’ve had that infection for too long. Now that you’re here in Budapest, we will get treatment for it.”

Vali looked scared and Annie moved closer and hugged her. “This is wonderful, Vali. Just think you will run again without limping.”

Annie was glad her sister would finally see a specialist. Back in the village, the only doctor they knew was an uncle who had been married to Emery’s sister. While he was nice enough, he lacked the knowledge of Budapest physicians.

When Rose took Vali to the doctor, Annie went along. She watched as the doctor asked questions and examined Vali. He also took an x-ray and prescribed a new medicine for Vali.

“Your daughter has a bone infection, and she will need to be on bed rest for a year,” he told Rose.

“A whole year?” Annie blurted out.

Her mother frowned at Annie, as she said to the doctor. “Of course, I’ll see to it that she rests. Can she be up at all?”

“For short periods, only,” The doctor replied. “That bone needs rest to heal.”

Vali accepted the doctor’s order without complaint. She spent most of her days in bed. The school provided a tutor, who came to the apartment to help her with her studies. Annie was proud of her sister’s patience, and knew that she would not have been so forbearing if she had been the one in bed all the time. At the end of that year, Vali was pronounced fit and was free of pain for the first time in years.

Annie proved to be an invaluable assistant to her mother. She enjoyed shopping for all the materials, accessories and fur. Her experience in her grandmother’s store had given her an experienced eye for materials. She learned quickly, and her mother entrusted her with more responsibility. Annie took over the billing and kept a file on the clients. Most of all, she enjoyed helping her mother with the fittings. She was impressed by her mother’s skill, as she watched her fit each client with a flattering style for that particular woman’s figure. Many of her mother’s clients were prominent women, and some were also good friends. While Annie and Vali read or played games in the evening, Rose would be busy designing or bent over the sewing machine to finish a project.

As part of her training, Annie went to a school for apprentices twice a week. These

classes were held in a school nearby in the late afternoon after the regular students had left. Annie felt degraded that first day when she walked into the classroom. An unpleasant odor hit her nostrils as soon as she opened the door. The room was filled with peasant girls. These girls are here to improve themselves by learning a trade, Annie fumed, and now I'm just like them. I not only lost my dream of going to the university, but I'm a peasant. She swallowed hard, a wave of self pity sweeping over her. Annie turned to leave when she spotted a young girl sitting alone on a bench who was dressed like she was. Annie walked over quickly and sat down next to her. As they talked and compared notes, Annie learned that this girl, Judi, was in a similar situation.. Judi's mother had also told her she should learn a trade. Her father was in England, but her mother had remarried. After that first day, Annie and Judi always sat together and became close friends.

Judi lived in a penthouse apartment across the park from Annie's apartment, with her mother and step-father and her grandparents. She invited Annie to a party soon after they met. Annie was very excited as she suspected boys might be invited, too. She dressed very carefully in a simple blouse and plaid skirt. Her heart was pounding as she rang the bell and was admitted by a very formal butler in a tuxedo. Judi came forward to greet her and then took Annie about the room, introducing her to other boys and girls there, as well as her mother and step-father.

"Mother, this is my friend, Annie, I told you about from the class. Remember?" Judi said.

"Oh yes, indeed," said Judi's mother, smiling warmly. "I'm so glad Judi has a friend like you, Annie, to sit with in class."

“Oh I feel the same way about Judi,” Annie replied. “I couldn’t bear the classes without her.”

Judi walked away to greet more arrivals, and Annie looked about the spacious room, noting the elegant furnishings. Judi looked very grown up today, Annie thought, with her blue silk dress and white lace collar. Suddenly, Annie was aware of her simple blouse and skirt. I feel like Cinderella, she thought, without any party clothes.

But she did not dwell on this as she enjoyed a violin solo by a boy, who had arrived with his violin tucked under his arm. He played a Beethoven sonata and a Mendelssohn piece, after he had introduced each selection. Annie was very impressed. She had never been exposed to social life like this and vowed she’d have a party dress for the next occasion. After all, my mother is one of the best coutures in Budapest, she thought.

Annie became more accepting of the apprentice program after Rose’s prediction that “soon no Jews would be allowed at the University at all” came true. An exclusionary clause, “Numerous Clausus” was put into effect, which meant that even the small number of Jews already at the university would have to leave. Jews were also barred from obtaining or renewing trade licenses. Would this affect her mother, she wondered. Annie was even more alarmed when she heard that the government could take your property with only minimal compensation.

Grandmother Ida visited them less often in Budapest as her robust health began to fail. Annie missed her grandmother and their special shopping trips. She sensed that her grandmother bought her things to make up for Annie’s lack of education.. When Ida seemed to be near death, Annie went to see her and bathed her and massaged her feet-her way of

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telling her grandmother just how much she loved her. When she died a few weeks later in 1942, Annie felt an enormous sense of loss.

Rose, Annie and Vali went back to Gyula for the funeral. Ida's children and their families were at the funeral, except for Laci. They all talked about the loss of their matriarch, who had been their strength.

Aunt Manci, pulled Rose, Annie and Vali aside and explained that Laci, the fun-loving ladies' man had been sent to a forced labor camp in the Ukraine and was not allowed to return for his mother's funeral. "Not only that," continued Manci, "he just married and his new wife was too upset to come today."

Rose looked disturbed at Manci's words. "I'm so sorry to hear about Laci. I can't imagine him in a labor camp. We feel relatively secure in Budapest, but I wonder how long before there'll be more changes, even danger for us."

Manci nodded, a troubled expression crossing her usually jolly face. "Yes, I'm sure there are hard times ahead for all of us. Here in the country, we're an easy target, and I worry all the time about Martin and our two sons."

"How are things at the shop?" asked Rose. She knew that Manci had taken over the shop when their mother could no longer continue.

"Things seem to be going fairly well, although I can't travel outside Hungary to the fabric fairs. But I still manage to get enough materials here to stock the store."

A few months after the funeral, Manci called to tell Rose that because of the restrictions against Jews renewing their business license, she had gotten a strawman, a Gentile,

who then virtually owned the business. "I had to put the agreement in writing," Mancini told Rose. "And that paper gave everything away to the strawman. I wonder if I'll get the business back after the war? That shop has always been in our family. I'm glad mother wasn't here to see what happened.

Rose consoled Mancini, but she was more preoccupied with events in Budapest. She made it a point to not only know what was happening, but to tell Annie and Vali. Although Hungary was supposedly neutral, the country had declared war on the Soviet Union and the United States back in 1941. Does this make us partners with Germany, Rose wondered. She had noticed more Jews escaping into Hungary from those countries that the Germans had overtaken. Since Hungary was not occupied by the Germans, the refugees felt safe. People passing through Budapest from Poland and Czechoslovakia talked about the atrocities in their countries, but no one mentioned extermination camps. Rose had met a wealthy Polish man, who was able to escape with his family because he was a jeweler and had the money to bribe officials. Rose and Annie listened to the radio, but usually got news by the chain of whispers that swept through the Jewish community.

Annie felt she was in the hub of things and sought information where she could. When she stood in line at the shops, she kept her ears tuned to the conversations around her. The more she learned, the more uneasy she felt. Where could they run to if the Germans came into Hungary?

Suddenly one day, late in 1943, Rose's forewoman, Juci, who was in charge of the seamstresses, did not come to work. Rose was alarmed and made inquiries immediately because

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Juci had told her a few days ago that she had been called into the Hungarian Police Headquarters. Although she was Jewish, she hadn't been worried. She considered the call a routine check.

When Rose and Annie went to Juci's home, they learned from a neighbor that she and her husband had been taken away by the Hungarian Gendarmerie, a cruel police unit. The neighbor heard that Juci's husband was Polish and didn't have the proper citizenship papers. He told them that he had watched from his window as the Gendarmerie led Juci and her husband out of their house. He then followed along to the train station and watched them being herded onto train cars.

"They were pushing and shoving this enormous group of people onto train cars. There were old people young people—even children. Those soldiers were packing them in so tight, I doubt anyone could sit down. I saw thousands of people. I heard they were headed for the Ukraine." He shook his head as he added, "Everyone sent there is slaughtered."

Annie and Rose hurried home in a state of shock. Juci and her husband were the first Jews they knew personally who were sent to be killed. Not a rumor, but names and faces. A bad sign.

The situation grew worse. Manci called and told them that some cousins of Annie and Vali, including Gabor from Budapest, had been taken to Russia as forced laborers to dig ditches for the German Army. Annie was shocked and upset as she recalled how kindly cousin Gabor had taken her under his wing when she and Vali first arrived in Budapest. He had shown her all around Budapest, even taking her up to Castle Hill in Buda. Gabor also took her to see her first

opera, "William Tell."

Annie had heard that the Nazi-Hungarians had begun sending Jewish company presidents and professors to the mine-planted front lines of Russia. If the Jews survived the sub-zero winters, they'd die when they stepped on one of the explosive devices.. This was part of the Nazis' program to purge the Jews of intellectuals. Now the Hungarian anti-Semitic policies were no longer rumors, but affecting her family. Annie feared for her uncles and other cousins. Their large Jewish family was in danger.

Rose handed the phone to Annie, as she sunk down into a chair. Annie's fears increased as Aunt Manci continued. "I'm so sorry to tell you this, but you see, Gabor was sent to the Ukraine, where he escaped from the Germans. When those anti-Semitic Ukrainians caught him, they sent him back to the Hungarian troops, who wasted no time in shooting him, a man of only twenty-two." She shook her head. "Most of those Hungarians fighting with the Germans in Russia are Nazis. Every week, we hear of more cousins from the villages in Transylvania or along the Bavarian border, who've been taken for forced labor and sent to camps. We hear that they go, but that's all. No one knows where. At least Emery, our brother is still safe in Budapest."

Annie cried silently with grief as she imagined Gabor being shot. She handed the phone back to her mother. Rose said to Manci, "We must be very watchful now. My forewoman and her husband were herded into cattle cars. I don't want that to happen to me and my daughters."

Rumors swirled around like a dust storm. Annie listened as her mother had long chats with her special friend, Lily. She was one of Roses's first clients, and was a Christian woman,

whose husband, Akos, was Jewish. Lily was Annie's favorite among all her mother's clients. She was like an aunt to her and Vali. Annie never grew tired of hearing how Lily and Akos met. Lily, a simple middle class typist, worked for Akos, a wealthy man and a leader in the Jewish community. While she found him a pleasant boss, she was shocked when he asked her out to dinner. Soon the business relationship led to love and then marriage. Akos could not do enough for his lovely wife. He told her, "I want my wife to be a well-dressed stylish woman."

Lily took him at his word and made the rounds of all the coutures in Budapest, interviewing each one. Rose was wearing a lovely checked blouse, cleverly stitched so the checks on the sleeves matched the bodice, on the day Lily came to see her. That blouse was the deciding factor. She chose Rose, and the women formed a close friendship of mutual trust and admiration. Lily respected Rose's business and fashion sense, while Rose admired how cleverly Lily had advanced in the company until she now held a very responsible position.

On her last visit, Lily had said to Annie, "Please be careful when you go shopping for your mother. I think we are heading for some difficult times."

The hard times came soon enough with a phone call one Sunday afternoon in March 1944. Annie was relaxing with her mother and sister in their large bath tub when the sharp shrill of the telephone interrupted them. Juli, the maid, brought the telephone into the bathroom. The telephone was a large black one with a long cord and mounted on a wheeled table. This commercial telephone had a box for coins for outside calls. Since Annie was closest to the door, she picked up the phone and heard the warning, "The Germans have crossed the border from Austria." The caller hung up.

“Mother, the Germans have crossed the border. They’re here in Hungary,” Annie said..

Rose quickly climbed out of the tub and stood dripping wet as she grabbed the phone. She called Mancsi in Gyula, first and then Kati, warning, “The Germans are coming. Head for the hills and hide.”

Annie and her family were apprehensive, but remained in Budapest. Annie thought that it was bad enough what the Hungarians had done to the Jews, what would the Germans do? Additional sanctions were placed against the Jews with more stringent food restrictions, especially on sugar and goose fat, a local staple. Now when Annie went shopping, she had to stand in long lines because Jews were allowed to shop only during specified hours. For the first time, Jews had to wear yellow stars stitched on their clothing. Annie and Vali hated the sight of the large yellow stars on their coats. The curfew placed on the Jews did not bother them because they were fearful of being out on the streets anyway. Next, Jews were told to bring in their silver, gold and radios, an edict which Rose ignored. She kept her radio hidden.

Rose received a frantic phone call from Lily one evening, saying that her parents home had burned. Apparently the Allies had bombed the industrial section of Budapest where they lived. “Could you take them in for a couple nights, while I arrange housing for them?”

“Of course,” Rose said without hesitation, as she agreed to take them into her already crowded apartment. “Send them to me.”

Annie and Vali moved out into the hall with their mother and gave Lily’s parents their bedroom. Lily’s parents were very grateful and left in a couple days after Lily found housing for them.

“Come to me Rose, when you need to,” Lily said as she took them away.

At Lily’s next visit, Rose asked her to stay for a cup of tea. Annie brought in the tea and began to serve. Eager for news, Annie stayed as Rose began, “Lily, we all know that the Hungarian government is fascist, and, of course, so is our Regent, Nicholas Horthy. Do you think he’s the coward everyone says he is and will let the Arrow Cross push him around?”

“I would expect so,” replied Lily. “I’ve heard that his wife is Jewish, but no one knows for sure. We all know some Jewish people who have been killed or deported, but at least Horthy has refused to allow large numbers of Jews to be deported—that is, except for the conscripted men.”

Rose nodded. “I know. Most of my cousins have been conscripted, and we have no idea what has happened to them. And now, Juci and her husband have been taken. And that was apparently a large group. While I’m disgusted with Horthy, I feel more anxious about the “Arrow Cross.” They might call themselves The National Socialist Party, but they’re really Hungarian Nazis. I think they’re nothing but a bunch of blood thirsty hoodlums. And their leader—is his name Szalasi? I’ve heard he’s worse than Hitler. If he takes over from Horthy, I shudder to think what will happen to us.”

“Mother, since Hungary has an alliance with the Axis, don’t you think it’s inevitable that the Arrow Cross soldiers will take over?” Annie asked. “I avoid them whenever I go out. They look so fierce. I certainly don’t consider them our protectors, which is what they say they are. But they’re not protectors, they’re persecutors.”

“I don’t know what will happen, but there is a strong chance the Arrow Cross will have

even more power than they have now,” responded Rose. “I thought that alliance would protect us, but with the Germans in our country now, anything could happen. I’m sure Horthy does whatever the Germans tell him to do.”

“Akos and I have talked about what to do when matters get worse,” said Lily. “When that time comes, we will leave our house and move into a villa in Buda. When Otto returned to Germany, he told me we could stay in his villa if we needed to.”

This was the first time Annie had heard Lily talk about a villa in Buda or Otto. “Who is Otto?” she asked..

“Otto was a German engineer, who worked with Akos at the textile mill. Occasionally I would work for him as his housekeeper. I still keep an eye on the place even though he’s gone back to Germany. The villa would be a good place to hide Akos.” Lily stood up, and said, “I must go now. I enjoyed the tea. Rose, let me know if you ever need help. You know how to reach me. Remember I’m your friend, and we’ll get through this together.”

That last conversation with Lily was uppermost in Annie’s mind when, in April, the Germans decided to identify where the Jews lived in Budapest. The houses or apartments of the Jews were designated with yellow stars. Those Jews who did not live in a designated house had to move to one. Rose’s apartment building was designated, and Annie watched as a big yellow star was painted on the door to the courtyard.

As soon as that star was painted, Rose’s business ended. Her savings were now her only means of support. Not only that, other people moved into their building. Jews either moved to the ghetto around the synagogue or into one of the designated houses. Vali no longer went to

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the gymnasium. Life came to a standstill.

Annie and her family took in two couples, one young and one elderly. Their maid, Juli, had left, and Rose gave the young couple Juli's room. This couple stayed only a few days before they left and went into hiding. They were agreeable people, and Annie was sorry to see them go. She had never heard of anyone going into hiding and wondered about it. The older couple, an attorney, Dr. Weber and his wife, Agi, were given the seamstress' workroom. Rose moved in with Annie and Vali. Whereas the young couple had been pleasant, the Webers were difficult and demanding. Rose made it clear that she was the ruler in her kitchen, which was not a problem for Agi, who was helpless in the kitchen anyway. Annie felt like she was a servant in her own apartment.

She avoided the Webers as much as possible and spent her days sitting on the steps of the courtyard, chatting with some of the new residents. Annie enjoyed meeting the artists and musicians who had moved in, and she became fast friends with a boy her age who later became a famous violin teacher. In the midst of this uncertain time, Annie found these newcomers very stimulating, and a bright spot on an otherwise dull gray canvas.

Annie's mother became wary of all the Jews being clustered in clumps. "I don't like the idea of my house being labeled," she said. "They could easily throw a grenade at our apartment building and kill us all at once. It's time to make a move," she told Annie and Vali.

Rose spoke with Lily, who had moved to the villa in Buda, where Akos went into hiding.. "Can you find places for me and my daughters?" Rose asked her. "I feel we would be safer if we were not all in the same dwelling."

“Of course,” Lilly had replied. “Could I do anything less after what you did for my parents when you took them in? Besides, I couldn’t bear it if anything happened to those precious daughters of yours, Rose. Give me a week, and I will have places for all of you.” Lily promised. “I’d have you come here, Rose, but my brother and another soldier went AWOL from the Hungarian army, so I’m hiding them, too.”

When Rose told Annie and Vali of her conversation with Lily, they were both excited. Annie felt that going into hiding would be an adventure, while Vali was anxious. They were both careful, however, never to talk about the plan to anyone, especially not the Webers.

The week went by swiftly for Annie. Her mother had purchased three Christian birth certificates. Annie stared at the piece of paper and her new name, Maria Debrecen from a village in Eastern Hungary. She did not like giving up her name, her identity, but accepted it. Vali took her Christian birth certificate without comment. She asked often, “What’s going to happen to us.”

Rose told Annie she was not concerned about her porcelain, the oriental rugs or any valuables. “As soon as we hear from Lily,” she told her, “We’ll walk out of this yellow star house.”

BUDA JUNE-OCTOBER 1944

A TIME OF HIDING AND DANGER

On September 10th, Annie, her mother and sister tore the yellow stars off their clothes and left early in the morning before the Webers were awake. Annie had hardly slept the night before as she wondered where she would live and what the people would be like. Would she have to stay in the house all the time? As her mother had instructed, she took with her only a few clothing items and good shoes and knee socks. Vali had done the same.

Lily had found places for each of them: Annie would stay with Rinci, a Christian woman and colleague of Lily's, who lived with her son in a lovely section of Buda. Rose would be the housekeeper for a divorced Hungarian army Air Force Captain, who Lily said would often be gone on flights. Valerie would be sent to Lake Balaton, to live with the ex-wife of this Captain. She was a Christian woman with a large family. Rose paid both families.

Annie felt secure and cared for with her new family. Rinci lived in a lovely furnished apartment in a modern section of Buda. Rinci was a pleasant woman, who adored her only son, Geza, and loved to cook for him. Annie enjoyed the fantastic meals. Rinci was quite nice to Annie, while Geza never looked at her, much less spoke to her. She thought he was an unhappy young man who was always scowling. While Rinci treated her like a daughter, Annie had the impression she was also fearful that she would seduce her beloved son. She often told Annie not to be so theatrical.

When Annie left home with her few items of clothing, she had taken one extravagant

item she could not leave behind: a black silk teddy with ecru lace. The teddy made her feel sexy and when she wore it, she felt like a woman. Annie had matured into a lovely young woman of seventeen with a fine figure and an ample bosom. The dangerous times cheated her of normal teenage activities or dating. She often tried on her teddy in front of the mirror in her room as she dreamed of romance. One day while trying on her teddy, she heard a soft knock at the door and Rinci walked in. She looked shocked and said, "Annie. What are you doing? I think maybe it's not so proper for a seventeen-year-old to have such underwear."

Annie's cheeks burned with embarrassment as she muttered, "It's only underwear. Most girls wear this kind of underwear." Rinci is so tied to her small town roots, she thought as she quickly grabbed a blouse to slip over the teddy. "She is not the sophisticated city woman that my mother is. Rinci had told her that she was a mining engineer's widow and had spent most of her life in small mining towns. Annie now wondered if Rinci thought she was trying to seduce her son. She vowed to keep the teddy put away, as she murmured a soft apology.

While Annie felt secure in her situation, she was sorry to learn from her mother that Vali had called to say she was unhappy at Lake Balaton. Vali told Rose that she was treated like a servant, scrubbing the floors and cleaning in addition to caring for the four children.

On the other hand, Rose and the captain, Gyorgy, got along well. As Lily had predicted, the captain was often gone on missions. Annie had met him only once, since Rose was fearful about her being in the apartment. Annie found him quite interesting with his flying stories and sense of humor. He was a large, stocky man, with bold features and blonde hair. He, of course, did not talk much about his work, other than to say that he was in the Hungarian

Air Force and flew under Hungarian-German command. Annie wondered if he knew they were Jewish, since the Hungarian Air Force was known to be anti-Semitic and German sympathizing. The main thing the captain talked about the evening she had dinner with them was how much he enjoyed her mother's cooking.

Annie was walking back to Rinci's apartment one afternoon in October, 1944, when she saw German Panzers (tanks) on the street and heard a soldier, with an Arrow Cross on his sleeve, shouting, "From now on, all the Jews will be killed."

She was frightened to see those tanks and wondered if the Arrow Cross had been given free reign to terrorize the Jews. By this time, all the Jews were gone from the countryside, and the only ones left were in Budapest. Annie felt the noose tightening around her. She had heard that Horthy had tried to pull out of the Axis Alliance. Was this why there were tanks on the street, and soldiers shouting about killing Jews? Since the Russians had invaded from the East, she feared that now the Arrow Cross would move quickly to finalize what they considered the Jewish "problem" in Budapest. To make matters worse, the Jewish Ghetto was firmly established and even the people in the designated houses had to go there.

Annie knew that the ghetto was not safe. She was glad to be on the Buda side of the Danube. Just yesterday, she had heard the rumor that people were being lined up and shot into the Danube. What a horrible barbaric action she thought.—and in the middle of the city, too with shops and restaurants all around. They didn't even try to hide the slaughter. They found a simple way to get rid of us without having to deal with our bodies, like we're animals. Is this what a civilized society does to its people?

What will be next, she wondered. Since the Russians are approaching our borders, the Nazis won't have time to organize a mass deportation. She understood that the Arrow Cross soldiers were avidly hunting down Jews. Annie had heard an even worse rumor that they often stopped men on the street and made them drop their pants. Any man who had been circumcised was shot on the spot. She hurried back to the apartment to call her mother.

Rose listened as Annie told her what she had seen. She sounded worried and warned Annie to stay put in the apartment. She then added, "I have a little job that will keep you there. The Captain just got back from a trip east and he brought home a goose. I'll bring it over to you."

"What am I supposed to do with this?" asked Annie, when Rose handed her the live goose.

"Fatten it up" commanded Rose. "We'll have a feast of roast goose and foie gras."

So Annie put the goose on the balcony. Each day she held the goose under her leg and forced its mouth open as she stuffed in soft corn and gently massaged its throat to make the bird swallow the food. After a month of fattening, the goose was ready for roasting. The roast goose and foie gras were magnificent. Annie knew that this would be their last grand meal for a long time.

One day in November, Rose called Annie and said, "Vali was homesick, so I told her she could come for a short visit. Do you want to talk to her?"

"Oh, no, I want to come over, too. I want to see Vali again. I've missed her."

"I don't know," Rose hesitated. "I don't think it's a good idea for all of us to be together."

It's a terrible risk."

Annie's pleading wore down her mother's resistance. Annie felt no qualms about boarding the bus to head for the Captain's apartment. As yet, she had not experienced any identity problems, but this was soon to end. When she boarded the bus, a peasant girl sitting there appeared to look her over carefully.

"Wait a minute," she said loudly, as Annie walked past. "You remind me of Ann Gabor. Are you Ann?"

"Oh, no," Annie said. "I'm Maria-Maria Debrezen." Annie had gotten used to her new name, but this was the first time she had been confronted and she felt scared.

The girl continued to insist that she was Ann, but Annie became quite theatrical, insisting that no, she was Maria Debrezen. She mentioned her home was in a small village in eastern Hungary, naming a village the Russians had already taken. Finally the girl appeared convinced. Although Annie did not recognize her, she was sure the girl was one of the students from the apprentice class.

Annie quickly sat down and stared out the window, her heart pounding with fear.

When Annie told her mother about her scare, she saw a worried frown crease her forehead. "Let's not dwell on it now, Annie, but you really mustn't stay long."

They put worries aside and enjoyed their reunion. Annie and Vali chatted non stop, comparing notes. The situation in Lake Balaton sounded even worse than Vali had first complained about. Yet, they weren't bothered by soldiers in the countryside at present, so at least Vali felt safe. "We shouldn't have to live like this too much longer," predicted Annie with

an optimism she didn't feel.

When the Captain arrived, he spoke to Rose in whispered tones, and Annie watched as her mother nodded frequently, listening intently..

"Annie and Vali, the Captain needs our help," said Rose.

"I have just told your mother that I'm with a Resistance group," he explained. "I need you to do something for me in the morning."

Annie had never heard that he was in a Resistance group, and from the look on her mother's face, she guessed that she had not known this either.

The Captain went on to share his plan. "I must leave to parachute a man from the Resistance group behind enemy lines in the morning. I'll be leaving very early, about two or so, Rose. I want you to give this packet of important papers to the Resistance person who'll be coming here about seven or eight in the morning. He will ring the bell twice." He handed the packet to Rose.

Rose nodded, and turned to Annie, saying, "You must go home now, Annie."

"But I don't want to, Mother. I want to stay and be a part of history." Annie pleaded, even offering to iron the Captain's shirts or do anything to help. The Captain wasn't concerned one way or the other whether Annie stayed.

Rose sighed, saying, "Well you have your mind made up, I see. But I still don't like the idea of the three of us being here together."

The Captain left as planned. Annie slept on the couch in the living room, while her mother and Vali slept in the bedroom. In the morning, the bell rang twice and Annie hopped up

to answer. A Hungarian Nazi soldier, Arrow Cross gleaming on his sleeve, barged in, roughly pushing her aside as he closed the door. "Who are you?" he asked. "I'm here to pick up Rose Gabor. She's been denounced as a Jew in hiding. We received an anonymous letter from a loyal citizen who tipped us off."

Annie was stunned and could only mumble, "I'm Maria-Maria Debrecen."

The ominous words, "A Jew in hiding," rang in her ears. Annie pondered the probability that someone had betrayed her mother. Only her mother's friend, Lily, knew where they were and Lily would never turn them in.. They had told no one at the apartment where they were going. As Annie thought about the matter a bit more, she remembered that right before they left, one of the seamstresses, Eva, dropped by the apartment. Her mother had always trusted Eva. When Rose mentioned some valuables, Eva offered that any valuables she gave to her, would be taken to her family in the country for safe keeping. Since there was no danger of bombing and the family wasn't Jewish, Rose felt they would be safe. As wise as her mother was, Annie felt she was foolish for allowing Eva to visit her here at this apartment. At least Eva hadn't known where she and Vali were. But that didn't matter now.

The Nazi soldier pushed past Annie and found Rose and Vali in the bedroom. Rose came forward quickly, saying that she was ready to go with him, adamantly denying that the girls were her daughters. Annie and Valerie each gave their new Christian names.

"I'm Maria Debrecen," Annie shouted.

The Nazi soldier was not convinced as he insisted, "Come on, you're Annie."

"No, No, I'm Maria," Annie shouted.

“Shut up, you tiresome girl and get dressed. You’re all coming to headquarters with me.”

Vali turned pale and said nothing, but her lower lip quivered as if she would cry any moment. They dressed quickly. There was no time to take anything, just the clothes they put on. After Annie dressed, she went into the bathroom to flush the packet of resistance papers down the toilet, fearing even more trouble if they were found. As her mother put on her high top shoes, laced up to her mid calf, she hid some gold coins in one shoe. Shaking her head sadly, she said, “It’s the only time we were all together.”

They had just gotten their coats on when the door bell rang again. This time it was the man from the Resistance. The Nazi soldier pulled him inside, and arrested him, too.

“I’m taking all of you to headquarters,” the soldier muttered “Move along quickly.”

The soldier then marched all of them up and down the hills of Buda until they finally arrived at the headquarters, a fancy hotel on a hill. Annie felt like a fish caught in the Nazis’ net.

BUDA OCTOBER 1944-FEBRUARY 1945

CAPTURE AND ESCAPE

The Nazi soldier marched the Gabors and the messenger up the stairs into the hotel lobby, a large hall with stairs winding up to a balcony. Arrow Cross soldiers were milling about, and one came over to talk to their captor. After a whispered conversation, the soldier led away the man from the Resistance group. Annie never saw him again. Their captor then shoved Annie, Vali and Rose into a large room down the hall from the lobby. Inside there were a dozen people standing in small groups, fear written on their faces. Annie heard moans and screams in the background which only increased her uneasiness. She glanced at Vali who was biting her lips and drooling bloody sputum. She was so pale, her eyes shone like large blue balls in a white mask.

Another Nazi officer arrived. He was rude and pushy as he took everyone's valuables. Rose was amused to receive a receipt for her watch and ring. "Do you think they'll really give them back to me later?" she whispered to Annie.

The officer asked Rose her name and she responded, "Rose Gabor." There was no point in pretending.

He looked thoughtful as he asked, "Was Emery Gabor your husband? Did he serve in World War I? Was he a high ranking officer?"

Rose nodded affirmatively to each question, hoping that her husband's decorated service in World War I might save her and her daughters.

"I was his adjutant in the war," the officer said his lips tight in a grim expression.

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Unfortunately this strange coincidence did nothing to improve their situation. In fact, it made matters worse. The officer appeared so angry, that Annie feared he was going to hit her mother. In the last war he was my father's servant, she thought, but now he has the upper hand. I wonder what he will do to us.

The officer then summoned a young Arrow Cross soldier. "Take these women to the clothing room," he said tersely, "and be sure they leave their clothes there."

What now, thought Annie? What was this clothing room, Annie thought as the soldier led them to the room next door. Are they going to take our clothes and kill us? She glanced at Vali, who was as white as snow, and then noticed that her mother also looked scared. Her mother—who could always handle any situation until now. Annie felt even more frightened, but was determined that she would not let that Arrow Cross soldier see how scared she was. It's all over, she thought. We'll all be dead by morning.

The young Arrow Cross soldier looked them over and muttered, "Move quickly," as he led them to the room next door. He was a pimple faced young man, whose gaze focused on Annie, making her feel uncomfortable.

"Take off all your clothes and pick out new outfits from that pile over there," he said, pointing to an enormous heap of filthy clothes. Annie looked with disdain at the pile of clothes, thinking there was nothing wearable in that miserable pile. As she hesitated, the soldier strolled over and asked if she needed help. She shook her head. He wandered away, but kept his gaze fixed on her. Annie ignored him as she slipped out of her clothes and into a pair of pants, a wrinkled shirt and an old suit jacket with loose threads around the neck where a fur collar had

been ripped off. She kept her shoes on. Once dressed, she felt dirty and itchy in her outfit. I feel like a prisoner and look like a refugee. she thought. But what difference does it make? Annie felt hopeless but was determined not to let that Arrow Cross soldier know how scared she was.

Rose dressed carefully in an old frayed jacket and skirt, but also did not remove her shoes. Vali chose a pair of pants, a frayed sweater and a coat with large pockets. While they were dressing, the soldier pulled Annie aside and said, "If you come with me, I can see to it that you may be saved."

"But there are three of us," said Annie. "I wouldn't leave without my mother and my sister. Unless you take all three of us, I won't go."

"Foolish girl," he said with an angry sneer. "You missed your chance."

He took them back to the room and ordered the people there to follow him. He marched the entire group down the stairs into a basement. They joined more prisoners down there. The young punk, as Annie now thought of him, barked a command, "Face the wall and raise your hands above your head."

Vali whispered to Annie that someone had put papers in her pocket, which she thought were American stocks and bonds. She was afraid to be caught with them. Annie told Rose the predicament. She suggested that Vali wiggle around so the packet of papers would fall out of her pocket, and she could kick them away. Vali wriggled about as she raised her arms, and felt the packet fell out of her pocket. She kicked it away. Annie passed the good news along to Rose. Doesn't that show how everyone tries to preserve themselves in a desperate situation,

Annie thought. Never mind that whoever put the stocks in Vali's pocket knew he was placing her in danger. Standing there with her hands above her head, Annie sighed to herself and then looked up and noticed hot water pipes lining the wall they were facing.

"We're going to shoot you now," barked the young punk," as he poked his gun in Vali's back and then Annie's. Vali began to whimper.

"Don't worry," Annie whispered to Vali. "They're not going to shoot us down here. If they did, they'd hit the hot water pipes. Then they wouldn't be able to take hot showers."

Annie tried to inject a little humor into their desperate situation. She feared the worst, but on the other hand, she could not imagine why they'd take a chance on damaging their property when they could just as easily shoot them outside. Hopelessness and resignation had set in. How could they possibly get away from this cellar?

Annie was right. Not a bullet was fired. Instead, the fifty or so prisoners were lined up and marched outside in columns, three abreast. The young punk hurried them along the cobblestone streets of Buda. We're on a Death March, thought Annie. She'd heard about those marches that no one ever returned from. The sun was now low on the horizon, and she had lost all track of time

The young punk was joined by another Arrow Cross soldier, who shouted constantly, "Get out of line and you'll be shot."

An elderly man stumbled and fell. He was immediately hit by the young punk with the butt of his gun. Annie looked up once and found the soldier walking next to her. He glared at her, but reached over and hit Rose in the back with the butt of his gun, shouting, "Go faster, go

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faster. If you stop, I'll shoot you." Rose stumbled, but recovered quickly, and resumed marching, her head held high.

Annie heard shots ring out occasionally and cries as the bullets found their mark, but she never looked back. She thought about her mother and worried that she was in pain. Did that young punk's prodding aggravate her sciatica? Rose often suffered from shooting back pains down her legs, due to the constant bending over to fit clients. What if her mother fell or didn't walk fast enough to please the trigger-happy soldiers? She could be shot to death right in front of her and she couldn't do anything about it. Not anymore than she could help the elderly on this march..

They marched past villas and the Swiss Embassy. We must look like a ragged bunch of refugees going past these mansions, Annie thought. The further down the hill they went, the more depressed she became. She grew weary of the young punk hitting and shooting people. The situation was hopeless, and she was terrified of what the soldiers might do next.

"I can't take it anymore," Annie whispered to Rose. She felt at her lowest point, without any future. "When the next truck rolls by, I'm going to throw myself under the wheels."

"Annie, Annie, don't take yourself so seriously," Rose exhorted. "Don't be a victim. Look at it away from the event—from the outside. Remove yourself, and it will entertain you."

Her mother's words, from the "Comedy of Men," gave Annie the strength to go on. She held her head high and kept marching. The soldiers marched them to the outskirts of old Buda, to a huge abandoned brick factory. This warehouse was apparently a gathering place for the Jews found in hiding. There were already hundreds of prisoners inside, who had been

placed twenty to thirty to a section. Annie could hardly breathe because of the strong stench of human waste. Not only were they shoved into a section with a clay floor and heaps of bricks piled against the walls , but there were no sanitation facilities. One corner of the section had obviously been designated for this. She was tired and hungry, but food and water were nowhere in sight..

Annie sank down and leaned against a stack of bricks. As her eyes adjusted to the darkness, she glanced around and noticed with dismay that not only was there no privacy or comfort, but men and women were lying about on the floor together. They had not been placed separately as if the Nazis were bound to destroy any civility. Or were they just in a hurry to get rid of them, so it didn't matter anyway? Everyone in Budapest had seen the Russians' large guns on the hills about the city, and knew the troops were closing in. The Nazis are in a hurry to get rid of us, she thought.

As soon as Rose and Vali sat down, Rose looked at her two daughters and said, "I'm proud of you both for your bravery. I wanted to spare you all this. I promise I'll do whatever I can to get us out of this."

"Mother, I don't know what you can do," said Annie. "It's obvious that we're on some sort of a death march—probably to the border. They haven't fed us tonight and probably won't in the next few days. Perhaps they mean to starve us to death. Or worse yet, they will shoot us at the border".

Rose shook her head, "I don't know. But each one of us must look after herself. You, Annie, should have gone with that young boy. He might have saved you."

“Oh no, mother, I couldn’t leave you and Vali. Besides, he was obnoxious,” said Annie.

Rose and Vali laughed. “Did you ever see so many pimples?” Said Vali.

Annie was relieved to hear Vali laugh. At least for the moment, her anxiety was abated.

Rose looked thoughtful, as she whispered very quietly, “We must each try to escape tomorrow.

Grab any opportunity and seize it. Then make your way to Lily’s villa. Remember the directions I gave you?”

Vali and Annie nodded. Their mother’s plan was their only hope. They shivered in the cold of the night and longed for morning to come.

In the morning, a different Arrow Cross soldier came in and said brusquely, “Get up and line up in the courtyard. Raoul Wallenberg is waiting”.

Once they were lined up in the courtyard, the soldier said, “All of you with Swedish protective papers step forward.”

Annie longed to be in that group but without Swedish papers, she could only stand there and watch. She knew that Wallenberg was a Swedish diplomat on a mission to save Jews by offering Swedish passports and papers. A handful of prisoners stepped forward. Wallenberg took them with him and left. The soldier then ordered the rest of the prisoners to line up. “We will march you west to Austria,” he said.

One of the male prisoners leaving with Wallenberg was a casual acquaintance of Rose’s. As he passed by her, he asked quietly if she had any money. When she shook her head, he handed her some coins, saying, “You can use this for bus fare.” Rose slipped some coins to each of her daughters as they took their place in line, three abreast in the column, ready to march.

Annie was tired and hungry, but those few coins gave her a boost as if escape was a possibility.

As the column of prisoners rounded the corner of the warehouse, Vali quickly stepped away and ducked behind a column of bricks. Rose saw this and whispered to the man marching behind, "Please step forward." Without question or change in his stride, he quickly moved up and marched beside Annie.

As she marched down the hills of Buda, heading for the river, Annie looked for her opportunity. She wondered about Vali. Would she make it to Lily's? She hoped the Nazis hadn't seen her leave the column. Actually, Vali was rather clever to leave the march right away, she thought.

Annie and her mother saw they were headed toward the Margit Bridge, which had been bombed and replaced with a pontoon bridge connecting to the island. Margit Island was a park in the wide section of the Danube River, with many chestnut trees. The only obvious way on or off the island was the pontoon bridge. It was like a prison surrounded by water. Why were they being marched onto the island, Annie wondered. Suddenly an air raid siren shrieked. Everyone ran in pandemonium. Annie and Rose were marching parallel to the river just steps away from where they should turn and head over the pontoon bridge.

"Now is the time," Rose whispered to Annie.

The soldiers were shouting, "If you run away, we'll shoot you."

Annie and Rose ran in the direction of the pontoons, but veered away at the last moment and faded into a large crowd surging toward an air raid shelter. As they sat in the shelter, they looked at each other and asked, "Do you think Vali made it to Lily's? Where is she?" Their

relief at escaping was overshadowed by worry about Vali.

After the air raid was over, Annie and her mother left the shelter and boarded a bus. A second air raid interrupted their trip. Finally, Rose nudged Annie to get off the bus. They walked up many hills, finally arriving at the villa, a fairly new house in an old section of Buda, high on a hill above the Danube River and just below the Citadel monument. Annie noticed there was not a garden around the stone house and the massive front door was just a few steps up from the street. Before they could ring the bell, the door sprang open, and there stood Vali.

“Vali, you were so clever,” Annie cried as she hugged her.

Vali shrugged, saying, “I saw that huge stack of bricks and felt I could hide there for awhile. I watched until I couldn’t see the soldiers and marchers anymore. Then I listened for noises. When there didn’t seem to be anyone around. I ran fast and caught the first bus I saw. And here I am.”

Lily came in just then and hugged them all. “All of you made it.. I can hardly believe it.” She wiped away the tears streaming down her cheeks, as she said, “I didn’t want to interrupt your happy reunion, but we must not take the risk of any of you answering the door bell again. I’m really the only one here who the Nazis aren’t looking for.”

Lily then went on to explain about their living situation. “You see, after Akos and I moved in here, my brother, Laszlo, went AWOL from the Hungarian army , along with his friend, Lev, who was a judge. They felt it was useless fighting the Russians alongside the Arrow Cross and the Germans. Then just yesterday, a Jewish engineer who had worked with Akos came by and asked if I could hide him, too. He told me that his son in the underground had just

been apprehended and was sentenced to death by hanging. He didn't know of course about all the others, but no matter. What could we do but take him in? He was quite good at forging documents in the ghetto, he told us."

"Lily, Lily," interrupted Rose. "With all these men here, how could you possibly take us in?"

"Don't give it another thought. Anyway, where would you go? Food is scarce everywhere, but we'll manage. My brother has already proven to be good at stealing food." Pointing the way upstairs, Lily said, "Come, I'll show you around and introduce you to the others."

Annie looked around the spacious villa, and noticed the staircase leading upstairs that Lily was already climbing. "Up here, we have three bedrooms. Akos and I will keep ours, and we'll have to move two of the men into the hall on mattresses. You and your girls will have the other one, Rose."

They heard the scurrying of feet as they followed Lily upstairs. Suddenly, four men appeared. Lily hastily introduced the men. Akos was quick to greet them, but Lily's brother and the other soldier hung back, briefly nodding and averting their eyes. In times like this, personal contacts were kept to a minimum. The less one knew about someone else was all the better in case of capture. The forger, however, greeted them and said slyly, "You girls can call me "Mr. Police Document." Annie and Vali laughed and said they would.

"And you can call me Annie," said Annie.

Lily led the way downstairs, and she pointed out a trap door under the stair case. "This

is your hiding place. Whenever the door bell rings, I want you to hide here. If you're upstairs, you must stay there and not make any noise."

"Will we all fit in there?" Asked Annie, peering inside. "The space looks rather small."

"Yes, it is, and you will be cramped. You will find a way to fit. If we're eating when the door bell rings, you will need to move quickly and take your plate with you."

As they walked through the living room, Annie noticed that the furniture was modest square furniture. A couch and three chairs were scattered about. At one end of the room was a large dining table. Lily told them that Otto had left all the furniture in the villa.

Lily led the way into the kitchen where she found some bread and jam for the hungry women. That night, as she crawled onto the mattress which she shared with her sister and mother, Annie could not believe all that had happened to her in the last two days. She had been captured, the worst fear of any Jew, but she had escaped. And more importantly, she was with her mother and her sister. In spite of all the people in the villa, she felt safe at Lily's. She wondered if Rinci was worried about her or knew what had happened. And the captain? Was he in trouble, too. She doubted she'd ever know.

The next morning, Lily told them she would be going to work. She had found a temporary office job, which not only brought in a little money, but enabled her to kept abreast of what was happening and to buy food when she could find it.

"Can we go out for walks? Asked Annie.

"You must be very careful," Lily replied. There are German soldiers swarming all over the neighborhood. Oh I almost forgot the most important thing. The Russians have started

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bombing the Citadel. When you hear the air raid siren, go across the street to the wine cave.

See it over there?" Lily asked as she led Annie to the window, and pointed out the cave.

"Oh yes. Could Vali and I go over there this morning and just see what it's like?"

"Be very careful," warned Lily. "The family that owns that estate and vineyard are living in the large fancy house you see there across the street. This wine cave is actually their basement. They never come down to the cave, however, unless there's an air raid. The cave is a good shelter because the walls are very thick and extend into the hillside." Lily left for work, promising to be home by early afternoon.

Rose had some misgivings about Annie, and also Vali, who begged to go along, going across the street. Annie told her mother that it would be a good idea to at least see their air raid shelter before they actually had to go there. Rose allowed them to go.

Annie and Vali crossed the cobblestone street to the cave. The estate was planted with grape vines, now untended and weed choked. The house was quite lovely Annie thought, as she gazed up at the large stone house on the hill, with its windows glistening in the sun. The wine cave appeared to have been carved out of the hillside just below the house. As they pushed open the door and walked into the cave, Annie shivered with the cold. The floors were dirt, and there were wine barrels lining the walls.

"It's pretty big, don't you think, Annie?" asked Vali.

"Yes, it is big, all right, but it certainly is damp. I hope we don't have too many air raids. I wouldn't want to spend a lot of time in here."

"I know," Vali agreed. "Staying in here for very long would be miserable."

Lily was able to bring home only a few staples that evening. Her brother, Laszlo, had gone out in his uniform. Since he had been a high ranking officer, no one asked for his papers. He had found a nearby army camp and was able to steal some food. "This is appropriated for the army," he told them. "He looked around at Annie and Vali and added, "You are the army."

One day, Mr. Police Document appeared very sad, and by evening he was sobbing. Annie and Vali sat on either side of him on the couch, comforting him and asking why he was so upset. Finally he said, "This is the day and the time when they hang my son." He murmured this over and over again. Annie patted his hand, in an effort to console him. The next morning, he left without a word.

The bombings continued night and day, and Lily decided that it was no longer safe to remain in the villa. "We will have to move into the wine cellar", she said. "Take your mattresses over to sleep on."

The thought of living in that cave was distasteful to Annie, but the thought of being bombed was worse. The move meant that they would have to come back to the villa for food or to use the bathroom. They could not do any cooking in the cave. Two days before Christmas, they took their mattresses and moved into the cave. Laszlo's friend, Lev, left. Lily's fears were realized when the villa was bombed a few days after they had moved into the cave. Amazingly, the kitchen at the villa was left nearly intact.

Laszlo continued to steal food from the army and scoured the neighborhood for apples that had been left on the trees. Lily worked each day and brought home whatever food she could find. Many days she came home empty handed.

Living in a damp wine cellar was not Annie's only problem. She had begun to itch all over and scratched constantly. When Rose looked over Annie's body, she decided that Annie had gotten lice from her jacket. Annie shed the jacket, and Lily found another jacket for her to wear. That evening, Annie went back to the villa and rubbed some of the fine dust from the bombed out walls on her skin to kill the lice. As she dashed back across the street, she shuddered. A dog lay there mutilated by a bomb. That could have been any one of us, she thought.

Food became more and more scarce. Lily told them the store shelves were empty. Laszlo mentioned that the Hungarian army was retreating and they were killing their horses as they went. That piece of news gave Annie an idea. She put on her brightest smile and went to the nearby Hungarian army camp, which was in disarray. No one paid much attention to her. She walked about until she came across a butcher who was chopping up chunks of horse meat. She struck up a conversation with him, and soon they were laughing together. When she observed that her family was very hungry, he gave her a few chunks. After that, Annie simply looked for an opportunity and stole the horse meat.

One afternoon, Rose looked about the kitchen at the bombed out villa and found some flour and walnuts, even some poppy seed and butter. She decided to make "beigli," a tasty roll made with just those ingredients, and Annie watched as her mother carefully formed the long beigli roll and placed it in the oven. The gas was still turned on at the villa, which had enabled them to cook the horse meat. "What would we do if the kitchen walls weren't still standing?" Annie said.

After her beigli roll was in the oven, Rose asked Annie to stay and watch it, as she headed across the street. Soon Annie began to vomit, so she quickly ran across the street to the cave. "You'd better lie down for a little while," advised her mother.

Rose then took Vali across the street to watch the beigli, but she, too vomited. Rose became suspicious and looked about and discovered a gas leak. Fortunately by then the beigli was baked. That was the last of the cooking.

Rose cut pieces from this long roll every day for each of them. Annie and Vali were given chewable vitamin pills to take with the beigli. Rose had bought the vitamins when they went into hiding as preparation for the times when they might be starving. Annie found the taste of the pill obnoxious, but often the beigli and the vitamin were all she and Vali had to eat that day.

The Hungarian Nazis had left them alone in the hills of Buda, but their peace did not last. They knew that the Russians had taken Pest in a bitter house to house fight by January 1945 and wondered if the same thing would happen in Buda.

The neigh of horses and the clank of knives, brought Annie and the others to the doorway of the wine cave. They watched a fight between German S.S. officers and Russian Cossacks. The Cossacks stabbed the Germans with large knives. When the battle ended and all the soldiers had gone, one dead German was left on the road. A Cossack soldier looked up and saw them watching. "Bury him," he ordered and clamored off on his horse.

Akos and Laszlo went outside and rolled the dead man over. They took off his dog tag and hung it on a fence. Burying the soldier was not easy since the ground was frozen solid and it

was a bitter cold day, as every day had been lately. They all believed the rumors about this being one of the most severe winters in Budapest. Akos and Laszlo managed to bury the soldier, using shovels and picks they found outside the wine cave, to dig a hole. They worked for hours.

Annie watched them. She noticed the Cossack's dead horse lying on the road and wondered what Laszlo and Akos were going to do with that. After the soldier was buried, they came back to the cave and asked, "What should we do? Eat the horse or bury it?"

Annie pointed out that cutting up the horse and cooking it would be hard to do, since by now the villa had been completely leveled. They all nodded thoughtfully. "But that ground is so hard. We could barely get a hole deep enough for a man, let alone a horse," said Akos.

"Why don't we just drag the horse off the street and into a ditch.." suggested Laszlo.

And that is what they did.

That evening, a Russian soldier, carrying a machine gun, pushed open the door and came staggering into the wine cave. "Give me wine and women," he said, his speech slurred.

Annie and Valerie were already in bed with their mother on a mattress near the front of the cave. Laszlo, Akos and Lily lay on mattresses further back in the cave.. Rose quickly sat up, pushing the girls under the covers and said, "No girls. No wine. The barrels are empty."

The Russian squinted at her and staggered over. As he felt around under the blanket, he grasped Valerie's hair, and a surprised look crossed his face as if to say, "What a lot of pubic hair this woman has." He began to unbutton his pants when he suddenly fell on top of Rose on the mattress and went sound asleep. He was very drunk, and snored noisily.

“Please, someone get this man off of me,” Rose called out. “Please take him away.”

No one moved. No one came to her rescue, because the Russian still had a tight grip on his machine gun, and the men were afraid to challenge him and possibly get them all killed. Rose tried to move away, but each time she did, the soldier would snort and mumble as if he would awaken. She lay very still, and Annie and Vali also lay frozen on the mattress all night long. Amazingly, the soldier got up in the morning and left without a word.

“Since the Russians have liberated us,” Laszlo announced, “I don’t have to hide anymore. They’re not looking for men like me, just women. I’m going to head down the hill and check out my apartment. It would be safer and more comfortable than this cave. I’ll be back.” he promised as he left.

He returned in a couple hours and invited all of them to move in with him. “We’ll be crowded,” he said, “but it will be better than this.”

Laszlo’s apartment seemed like paradise to Annie after the damp cave. She didn’t even mind that she and her mother and sister were given the maid’s room, which had only a single bed. Laszlo was in his bedroom, and Lily and Akos in the other bedroom. Annie felt squished, as she and Vali took turns sleeping at the foot of the bed, but she didn’t mind. After all, she was in an apartment with some security and comfort. The bombing had stopped since the Germans were gone. Her only fear now was the Russian liberators.

The safety of the women was uppermost in everyone’s minds. They had heard the rumors of women being brought in to peel potatoes who were then gang raped by the Russians. Annie and Vali dreaded the frightening nights with Russian soldiers roaming the streets, poking

guns through windows and shattering glass. In fact, there were no windows left in Laszlo's apartment, which was on the ground floor. There were piles of rubble under the windows.

Early one morning, Annie was awakened by a noise, and she looked up to see a Russian soldier peering in at them. She expected him to climb into the window, but he didn't. Instead, he came in through the front door, and she heard him in the living room. By then, everyone was awake and gathered in the living room. The soldier was rummaging through drawers and asked for shoes. Lily had brought along a box of them, which she got from the bedroom. He grinned impishly as he took one shoe from each pair. He then wandered about the apartment grabbing things and putting them in a bag he carried. Then he gazed at an Oriental carpet. He took it outside and put it on his horse which was tethered in front of the building. They heard the soldier rummaging around in the small bedroom when he came out with an ocelot jacket that Lily had given Annie. He went outside and put that on his horse, too. "My horse's name is Konya," he said to no one in particular. His speech was beginning to slur.

A second soldier strolled in. By now, it was clear to Annie that both men were drunk. The second soldier pulled out a World War I sword and pierced the couch and chairs with it. Annie watched in amazement as he poked his sword in the furniture. She'd never seen such a huge sword before.

The first soldier staggered down the hall, and Annie followed to see what he would do next. He went into the bathroom, pulled a live fish out of his pocket and put it in the toilet. Annie watched as he pulled the chain. His fish flushed down the drain, and he uttered a string of words, obviously furious. He denounced the toilet as a "stealing machine." Annie quickly

rejoined the others in the living room, but she laughed to herself knowing that the soldier probably came from a poor Russian village and had never seen a toilet before.

“Davaj chasi.” (Give me your watch.) shouted the second soldier. Like many of the Russian soldiers, he wore watches from his elbow to his wrist. “Give it to me,” he added impatiently. Only Lily and Laszlo had watches to give. The soldiers took them and went out the door.

“What was there left to steal?” asked Annie.

Rose took the girls into the bedroom and said, “It’s time to go home and see if our apartment is still there. Once we get to the river, we’ll have to find a way to cross. What do you think?”

“The Germans are gone and the Russians are everywhere. We can’t avoid them. I’d love to see our apartment—see if it’s still there. Let’s go,” said Annie.

Vali agreed, adding, “Then there would be only three of us to feed.” A frown creased her forehead. “Do you really think our apartment will be there? What if someone is living there?”

“I don’t know,” said Rose, “but we must go and see.”

They came back into the living room. Rose said to Lily, “We’ve imposed on your kindness long enough, Lily and Akos. You, too, Laszlo. But now we’re going to head across the river and check on our apartment.”

“Oh Rose, do you think it’s safe?” asked Lily.

“Pest is already liberated, and Buda appears to be, too. I feel we have to take a chance. Besides, if any of my family survived the war, they’d come to our apartment. I hope it’s still

there," she said, shaking her head.

"Of course, Rose. You must go. Please come back if your apartment is gone. You'll always be welcome here with us."

After a tearful good bye, the Gabors left. It was February 15, 1945

BUDAPEST FEBRUARY-MAY 1945

JOURNEY BACK HOME

Annie led the way down the hill to the Danube River, and Vali and Rose followed. They came to the tunnel that led to the Chain Bridge. The passageway was filled with heaps of rubble and stacks of dead people. Annie stood aside as Russian soldiers marched a column of captured German soldiers through the tunnel to the shore. She wondered if these were the German soldiers who had held the Citadel, long after everyone else had surrendered. Hitler had ordered them to "hold out" even when they were surrounded by the Russians.

The Chain bridge, the first suspension bridge in Budapest, had been destroyed. In fact, Annie didn't see any bridges left connecting Buda with Pest, because the Germans had blown up all the bridges. Annie stood on the shore and watched as large chunks of ice floated by. Rose and Vali walked up and joined Annie on the shore.

"The bridges are all gone, Mother. How can we get across?" asked Annie.

Just then a young university student rowed up in his skiff and offered to take them across for a price. Rose struck a bargain with him and then turned to her daughters. She had given each of them a roll of paper bills to place in their bosoms for safekeeping. Vali was so flat chested, she promptly lost hers, but Annie's bills were snugly tucked in her ample one. Annie handed over her money, and the young man invited them into his boat.

Vali climbed into the boat, but Annie hesitated. The ice floats (Zajlik) were rumbling in the river, and she was terrified. She was sure they'd be hit by the swirling floes. A firm push by her mother ended Annie's indecision, and she sat down warily in the tippy boat. The young

man skillfully rowed around the ice floes, and landed them safely on the opposite shore in Pest.

Annie breathed a sigh of relief as she stepped out of the boat. The journey across had not been as bad as the anticipation. She hurried up the street, anxious too see if there was still an apartment to come back to.

“Annie, Annie, we’re not in a race,” gasped Rose as she attempted to keep up with her daughter.

“I’m sorry, Mother. It’s just that I’m so eager to see if our apartment building is still standing.”

As they rounded the corner, they saw that the apartment building across the street had been leveled, but their building stood tall, the walls intact. The only damage they noticed were a few holes in the courtyard.

“It’s those thick 1846 walls,” said Rose. “Not even a bomb could knock them down.”

Warily, they went in the door and up the stairs to their old apartment. When their knock on the door went unanswered, they opened the door. Inside, they saw new furniture, but Rose’s 19th century Killiam rug was there, as well as her Oriental runner in the hall. They wandered about the apartment, but saw no one. While it was obvious the apartment had been occupied, no one was living there now. Rose surmised that Germans had probably lived there and bought the furniture.

“Isn’t this amazing,” said Annie. “I can’t believe we’re here. The apartment looks like it was waiting for us. I’m amazed that there’s no one around. And look, no broken windows.”

Rose shed a few tears as they all hugged and settled in. Unfortunately, their privacy did

not last. A few days later, a Russian soldier appeared and asked for a room. He was an officer from the Ukraine, and communicated with them in German. Rose allowed him to stay, feeling she couldn't refuse him.

Annie was wary of him from the outset. He not only looked at her in a way that made her uncomfortable but often tried to force his attentions on her. She turned down his frequent offers of jeep rides, and made sure she was never alone in a room with him. The officer, whose name was Constantine, was around more than he was gone. Annie wondered why he didn't have more duties. After all, she speculated, he was an officer and must have soldiers under his command. Constantine was polite enough, but his gaze followed Annie whenever she walked by. Her uneasiness increased.

One evening, Rose, who had managed to find a head of cabbage somewhere, had boiled the cabbage and was preparing a pasta to serve with it. The stove was cooling down and she asked Annie to go down to the basement and bring up some wood.

"Let me help you," said Constantine, rising from his chair.

Annie shook her head, but Constantine persisted until Rose said in Hungarian, "Stay seated—You stay glued to that chair."

Annie started to get up from her chair, when Constantine said to her, "If you get up from that chair, I'll shoot you in the leg."

Annie stayed seated. There was no wood brought up from the basement that night. Not long after that, the Russian moved out. Fortunately, no other Russian soldiers came by to ask for a room.

As the war ground to an end in the spring, Annie, Rose and Valerie wondered about the rest of the family. They were sure that everyone had been deported. Annie felt that the waiting and wondering were almost as stressful as hiding. They had heard about Gabor, Rose's brother. His girl friend told them that he had been one of those who were shot into the Danube.

"Who will come back to us in Budapest?" Rose asked often. "Who's left in our family?"

They were on an emotional roller coaster, and left a note on the apartment door each time they went out. The Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JJDC) had been set up to reunite families. Annie went to the JJDC office every day for news, but thus far there were no lists of survivors. While she was frustrated, she would not give up.

One afternoon the door bell rang, and Annie opened the door. There stood Aunt Manci. Annie screamed with delight and hugged her. Rose and Vali came running in, and Rose hugged her sister, tears streaming down her face. "I wondered if I'd ever see you again. Let me have a look at you? Where did they send you?"

Manci came inside and set down her back pack. She was thin, but not gaunt. "Rose, where else would they send any of us but to Auschwitz, that death camp. Fortunately, I was healthy and useful to them, so I survived. There are many others who didn't, I can tell you."

"And the others?" Rose asked anxiously.

Manci shook her head. "All of our family in the village was sent to Auschwitz, or other camps. I'm not sure where. They herded us up so quickly. I don't even know where they took Martin. And our sons?" She shook her head sadly.

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“Enough of that sadness. Mancini, come, sit.” Rose led her by the hand to the couch.

“Vali would you make some tea?”

Mancini sunk down gratefully on the couch. “I’ve been walking a long time. When the war was over, I felt grateful just to be alive. Look, I’ve brought you some gifts.”

She opened her backpack and pulled out two Nazi flags. Annie drew in a large breath, a horrified expression stealing over her face.

Mancini laughed at Annie’s distaste. “Don’t worry, I haven’t become a Nazi. But I’m a practical woman. The material in these flags is a fine Egyptian cotton. We have lots of red and a little black and white to work with. What do you say, Rose? Do you think you can make some dresses for your daughters?”

“Of course,” said Rose. “I’ll start right away.”

Rose carefully removed the white circle and black swastika, and used the large piece of red cotton to make a lovely low cut dress for Annie with a square neckline. Annie covered the buttons in the back with the white material, and added a white sash. Rose took into account Vali’s figure and stitched for her a high necked red dress with a large pocket bodice and white buttons down the back. Vali embroidered a bird on the pocket.

Annie could not remember the last time she had a new dress, or even any clothing that was decent. She viewed this red dress as a symbol of returning to normalcy, a time when a woman could think about how she looked and how to make herself attractive. The first time Annie wore the red dress she walked down the street as if she were going to a special occasion. The event was made all the more special because she chanced to meet her friend, Judi, from the

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apprentice school. The two friends chatted and promised to meet soon.

Judi's parting words were, "Annie, you're a knockout in that red dress."

Chaos was gradually replaced with a semblance of order. Rose re-established her dressmaking trade, often sewing skirts from men's suit material. Manci was determined to reclaim her business and find her family. After a week, she left for Gyula. Annie reassured her that she would keep checking at the JJDC office.

Two weeks later, Manci's husband, Martin, came to their apartment. He was astounded to learn his wife was still alive, and quickly headed to the country to join her. The only other relative who survived was Dr. Friedman, whose wife had been Emery's sister. Dr. Friedman, returned to his village and reestablished his medical practice.

His return to the village was noticed by Manci, and she mentioned this to Rose on one of her calls. She kept Rose informed of life in the village and who had returned. . Sadly, there was no news about the Gabors. Manci was heartbroken when she finally learned that both sons had been killed. She did manage to reclaim her store and struggled to get her business going again.

Many relatives did not return and their fate was unknown. Occasionally, Annie would get a name or two at the JJCD office, but always of a death. The conscripted men had simply disappeared. Annie assumed that they had been killed, like cousin Gabor. The rest of the family, the lovely Katie, all of the Gabors were gone. Her mother assumed they had been gassed at Auschwitz. They heard from Laci's wife, that he had been killed in the Ukraine. A fellow prisoner told her that Laci had been hung up and sprayed with water. He froze to death. Annie

wondered why the man had to be so graphic with Laci's wife. Wasn't it enough that he died in the camp?

May 1st, May Day, was memorable for Annie that year. What a beautiful holiday set aside to honor workers, Annie thought. She watched the parade of Communist workers proudly march by and sensed the hope and optimism they embodied. The war was over. She and her family had survived, thanks in a large part to Lily and her mother's resourcefulness. I'm a woman of nineteen, she thought. I know I can meet any challenge the future will bring. After all, I've had the best of teachers.

EPILOGUE

Annie left for a summer session in Lyden in the Netherlands, along with a girlfriend and her two brothers in 1948. Although Annie was not a student as they were, she was able to get a student visa. This was the only way anyone could leave the country in those years..

The euphoria and optimism Annie had felt at the end of the war had quickly faded. As she thought about past events, she realized she no longer felt any attachment for the country which had treated people in such an inhumane manner. Early on it was not the Germans killing and mistreating Jews, but fellow Hungarians. (Nazis) She was disillusioned even more when she worked on the election board in her neighborhood and saw the cheating of the Communists who put in extra ballots for their candidates so they would have a majority.

Annie watched as the Communist government slowly took away companies. People had just regained their companies in 1945 only to have them nationalized in 1948. Her mother was taxed more heavily, because her business was a private enterprise. Rose was considered an exploiter since she hired employees. Her business, too, was taken over by the state.

Annie decided to leave the country at her first opportunity. Her mother assumed she would be in Holland for two weeks, and indeed this is what Annie had planned. Once the summer session was over, however, Annie stayed. When she could not get a work permit, she went to Brussels, Belgium and established a couture business there. Her mother's prophetic words about the value of having a trade came true. She became known as a talented and stylish

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couture. Clients often remarked that they couldn't have Rose in Budapest, but at least they could have her daughter in Brussels. Annie married in Brussels and came to the United States in 1950. She ultimately earned a college degree.

After years of working for the state, Rose established her own business again. One of her clients was Mrs. Andropov, the wife of the Russian ambassador to Hungary. Rose came to the United States in 1956.

Vali lived with her mother in Budapest and finished her university degree in chemistry. She married her boss, who was a brilliant chemist. Rose convinced them to emigrate, and they, too, came to the United States in 1956.

Rose never spent those gold coins in her shoe. Annie still has them and fashioned them into a necklace which she proudly wears.

